R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 016 855 VT 004 394

THE CHALLENGE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR SCHOOLS, STATES, AND THE NATION.

BY- VENN, GRANT
OFFICE OF EDUCATION (DHEW), WASHINGTON, D.C.

PUB DATE 67
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.68 15P.

DESCRIPTORS- SPEECHES, *VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, *EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS, *FEDERAL LEGISLATION,

THE MAJOR DILEMMA AND CHALLENGE FACING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IS THE FACT THAT SOCIAL CHANGES LAG FAR BEHIND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES. BASIC ISSUES RELATING TO THIS DILEMMA INCLUDE--(1) DROPOUTS LEAVE SCHOOL BEFORE THEY ACQUIRE VOCATIONAL SKILLS, (2) ADOLESCENTS IN OUR CULTURE LACK A CLEARCUT WAY TO MOVE FROM CHILDHOOD TO A CONTRIBUTING ROLE AS AN ADULT IN SOCIETY, (3) RAPID CHANGE, INCREASING EDUCATIONAL LEVELS, AND GREATER NEEDS TEND TO ISOLATE PEOPLE FROM SOCIETY FOR ECONOMIC REASONS, WHILE GEOGRAPHICAL ISOLATION CAUSES MANY RURAL AREAS TO BE LEFT OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT, (4) THE RISING ASPIRATION RATE OFTEN EXCEEDS RESULTS AND RISING FRUSTRATION EXCEEDS BOTH, (5) THE EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF ADULTS OFTEN HINDERS THEIR ADJUSTMENT TO CHANGES, (6) A LACK OF CLEAR CUT JURISDICTIONAL CONTROL OVER PROGRAMS CONFUSES THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM, AND (7) WHETHER TO EDUCATE FOR A JOB AND A SATISFYING ROLE IN SOCIETY OR TO REMEDY AND CORRECT MUST BE DECIDED. TO RESOLVE THESE ISSUES, THE BELIEF THAT OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION IS THE REAL PREPARATION FOR LIFE MUST BE IMPLEMENTED BY PROVIDING THE BEST POSSIBLE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR THE GREATEST POSSIBLE NUMBER OF PEOPLE. TO ACHIEVE THIS, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS INTRODUCED A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACT OF 1963 TO SET UP PILOT PROGRAMS, COSTING AN ESTIMATED $30 MILLION ANNUALLY, TO FIND WAYS TO OVERCOME THE BASIC PROBLEMS. THE AMENDMENT HAS FOUR ASPECTS--AN EXPLORATORY OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR ALL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, PROJECTS TO ASSIST THE STUDENT IN DEVELOPING TO HIS MAXIMUM THROUGH EDUCATIONAL PART-TIME WORK EXPERIENCE, A SERVICE IN SCHOOLS FOR PLACING STUDENTS IN ENTRY JOBS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CURRICULA IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO SERVE THOSE NOW BEING IGNORED. WHETHER THIS AMENDMENT BECOMES LAW OR NOT, FEDERAL PERSONNEL ARE SAYING, "THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOLS FOR ITS STUDENTS CANNOT BE OVEREMPHASIZED. THE RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT JUST FOR INSTRUCTION. IT APPLIES TO THOSE WHO LEAVE AS WELL AS THOSE WHO REMAIN--TO THE DROPOUTS AS WELL AS TO THE STAYINS." THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE AMERICAN VOCATIONAL ASSOCIATION CONVENTION (CLEVELAND, OHIO, DECEMBER 6, 1967). (EM)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Office of Education
Washington, D.C. 20202

THE CHALLENGE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR SCHOOLS, STATES, AND THE NATION,

An address by Dr. Grant Venn, Associate Commissioner for Adult, Vocational and Library Programs, U.S. Office of Education, before Members of State Boards for Vocational Education, meeting at the American Vocational Association Convention in Cleveland, 9 a.m., Wednesday, December 6, 1967, Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman--ladies and gentlemen. It's very plesant to be with you here this morning in Cleveland. I'm sorry I couldn't be here for the first vocational board members' session on Monday afternoon. I'm sure you must have gained a great deal from the discussion with Dr. Kishkunis of Pittsburgh and Dr. Parkinson of the "little MIT" in Milwaukee.

I see that I am followed on today's program by the widely-known and respected Dr. Mel Barlow--and I'm very glad the program is not the other way around. For the past several months he has been in the position of coordinating the efforts of an outstanding panel of critics of the ongoing program of vocational education. I'm sure you will agree that it is better to precede your critic on the platform than to follow him... at least unless you have had full access to his manuscript, which I have not.

Two weeks ago at a conference in Washington, Commissioner of Education Harold Howe said that if it is true the sins of fathers are visited on their sons, then it should be true of virtues as well. The particular virtue he had in mind was the idealistic statement in the Declaration of Independence which begins: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." Of this statement, Commissioner Howe went on to say that the United States has been suffering for almost two centuries now from the idealism of the Founding Fathers--and that such a phrase can no longer be quoted so much out of conviction as it must be out of desperation.

For all these years since the Declaration of Independence was published, this matter of equality has been giving us all kinds of trouble. Every succeeding generation has tried to figure out, in the context of its own times, what our forefathers meant by stating that "All men are created equal."

Since common observation tells us the reverse every day, we have concluded that only in a special sense can all men be considered equals. Broadly stated, it means that as Americans they are entitled to equality under the law in preserving life and liberty, and in seeking happiness.

It surely does not mean that all men are created to be equally wealthy, equally intelligent, equally handsome or equally strong. It cannot mean that all men are created to be lawyers or members of boards for vocational education. There are many, I am sure, who would say that there are already more than enough in each category. It does not even mean that all of us were created to become Ph.D.'s or college graduates or, perhaps even high school graduates.

One hopes it means that all of us were created to have an equal shot at all these things if we are so inclined and an equal chance to succeed.

One thing is certain: Handing down advice to future generations is a risky business at best. It should be undertaken with great caution.

Perhaps you have heard the alleged anecdote about Stalin and Krushev along this same line. On his deathbed, Stalin is supposed to have called Khrushev to his side to tell him that he had been keeping an eye on him; that he felt Khrushev was a comer and that he would probably soon be in control of the Soviet Union. For that reason, said Stalin, he had

prepared two letters which he handed to Khrushev with instructions to open the first one only if the country appeared to be in great peril from any cause and to open the second one only as a last resort in case Khrushev should find himself in great personal peril.

As it turned out, of course, Khrushev became the chairman--and in due course the country bogged down in extreme economic difficulties. Khrushev decided the time had come to open Letter No. 1. He did, and all it said was, "Blame it all on me." So he blamed it all on Stalin and eventually things got better and Khrushev weathered the storm.

Before many years passed, however, Khrushev himself fell into disfavor with many of his colleagues and he realized the time had come to take drastic action before the roof caved in. So, he opened Letter No. 2. All it said was, "Prepare two letters!"

It seems likely to me that future historians will find among the characteristics of this present society in America that we are experiencing extreme technological change, rapid changes in the labor force patterns and critically high unemployment rates among the young people of the United States.

As I have said elsewhere, change itself is certain, but is is also certain to be slow when applied to people. Computer technology can change almost overnight. But it takes time to change a farm boy into a computer programmer. It may take even more time to change his teacher. That all these changes are actually taking place, regardless, is something of a tribute to the basic adaptability of the human animal.

The fact that social changes are running far behind the technological changes is an indictment of the social scientists and, I'm afraid, we educators.

Thirty per cent of the youth in this country are still leaving school before completing high school. At the same time, during a period of maximum national economic growth and an increasing gross national product, with the total unemployment rate down in the 4 per cent range, we still have more than 20 per cent of the young people in the country--those between the ages of 16 and 22--unemployed. Even more discouraging: over 30 per cent of the Negro youth in this country in the same age group are unemployed. All this while we can measure the greatest critical shortage of technical manpower ever known in this country because of the increasing impact of technology.

The dilemma which I have just described is also the major challenge facing vocational education today. It is not possible--it is not even desirable--to separate education, especially education for the world of work, from the basic problem of preparing for work.

I think the best perspective on this problem can be achieved by outlining some of the basic issues which we face as school officials and as members of society as a whole.

First of all, as I said, 30 per cent of the youth in this country are still leaving before completing high school. Are we really going to

revolutionize things and teach everyone to read and write and then be confident that--somehow, they can get vocational skills? They can't do it if they leave at that age level. We haven't really focused on this problem. Of course, these boys and girls may not be old enough yet to have, perhaps, stolen cars and gotten into real trouble, so we don't get quite as concerned as we should. I think this is a basic issue for us.

Second, there is no clearcut way for many adolescents in our culture to move from childhood to adolescence to a contributing role as an adult in society. The dropouts, and many other youngsters in our schools do not see--and the schools do not provide--a way by which they may move from adolescence into adulthood. Youngsters don't know what their parents do; they don't know really about work.

I think another issue is integration. Not the race integration issue, but one which may be more serious as far as the economic level of people's environment goes. As we change rapidly, as educational levels are increased, as needs become greater, we find people tending to become isolated from society for economic reasons. There is also the geographical isolation or segregation which has resulted from certain of our rural areas being left out of the mainstream of technological development.

The next major issue I see is this: because of the improved communications skills we have, the improved ability of people to find out what is going on in this earth, we have rising aspirations at a much greater rate

than we have rising results, and consequently, we have rising frustrations exceeding both. Almost anyone who has a television set knows of the possibilities available to him as a citizen. Yet when we apply some of our programs to solve these problems, we don't necessarily find that a man and his family are in better condition.

I think we have another major issue which is sort of buried in our practices, times and problems. That is the educational level of adults. Over half of the adults in the United States of age twenty-five in 1960 had not graduated from high school in this country. These statistics from the 1960 census data mean that the majority of our adults face a real problem of adjusting to a rapid technological explosion and change.

Another major issue--one of special significance, I think, to this audience--is the one involving jurisdictional control. Each of us, whether we are in industry, education or the Federal Government, is involved with this each day. Whose responsibility is it to do what? Who should run this program and who is getting my territory? Who should do this and who should do that? We have a terrific problem. This goes back, I think, to the era of stability--when our Nation was agricultural. Political boundries and definitions of responsibility were very easy to define because they always stayed the same. Now, with our great population mobility and growth and our speed of transportation, we find these jurisdictions continually threatened and continually confused between the Federal and State governments, between the schools and industry, and between the cities and counties.

I believe the most serious issue that we need to consider is job education and development vs. remediation and correction. Where do we put our bets in the long run? It really isn't an either/or thing, I'm afraid. We simply cannot say that those who are not educated and those who are isolated and locked out of our society for whatever reason are expendable, and forget them. But what do we do about the young people in our schools now in terms of the long haul? Do we simply allow them to drop out and then correct this later through remedial programs, or do we invest our money to get the largest return?

At the time of Jefferson, when it was decided everyone had to learn to read and write so that we could have a politically viable country, this was probably the extent of necessary educational horizons or aspirations. Essentially, those who were governing had to be able to read. At that time a majority of our people were in agricultural and related activities. Muscle power had some economic worth on the labor market.

I believe we have reached a time now when the question of occupational education comes into the same perspective as general education. The individual does not have an education unless he has occupational skills, because in many ways an individual's role in society is as a worker. It is more important to give him basic psychological and ego development, by giving him a role in society--than even an income!

The school is the one institution in which all of our young people come together in one way or another at one time or another. Nowhere else can we really focus our resources so effectively. Therefore, the schools must be changed from "selecting-out" institutions to "guiding-in" institutions--for the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the bright and slow.

So now we see that the schools of the Nation--in particular the vocational schools and those schools, even colleges, which offer vocational training of any kind--have assumed an entirely new role. Now occupational education is the real preparation for life, not just reading, writing, liberal arts and the so-called "finer things."

The only real question left, then--for me as a member of the Federal establishment as well as for you as a member of the State establishment--is how best to go about providing the best possible vocational education for the greatest possible number of people.

What are we doing at the Federal level? Well, for one thing, the administration has introduced legislation, still pending before the Congress; a proposed amendment to the Vocational Education Act of 1963 setting up pilot programs to see if some of these basic problems cannot be overcome.

The additional cost of these experimental programs is estimated at about $30 million a year, bringing total annual Federal expenditures for vocational and technical education to more than $300 million. And if

that sounds like a lot of money, look at it this way. The people of this country today are spending more money to import coffee than they are for vocational education. They spend more than three times as much for foreign travel and more than 100 times as much for telephone service as they do for vocational education.

What do we expect to get for our $30 million dollars extra?

This legislation is based on the philosophy that the school has a significant role and responsibility in manpower development. The mere recognition that schools can improve their performance in equipping the disadvantaged with saleable skills is not enough. The whole educational system--the curriculum, the instructional programs, their relationships to each other--must take into account present and future occupational opportunities. To say the schools have failed this responsibility is grossly misleading. The fact is--the schools have not been assigned this as a part of their total mission. The public schools are not responsible for assuring total social justice, but they can serve as a viable vehicle for assuring appropriate opportunities for all to prepare for satisfactory employment.

The legislation has, essentially, four aspects, each of which may have direct relevance to your program planning. The first is an exploratory occupational education program for all junior high school students. As you know, it is during the 7th, 8th and 9th grades that the majority

of our young people drop out of school. Or if there is a State law which prevents it, they reach a decision at that time that they have had enough report cards telling them they aren't going to make it. They leave as soon as they can. This new concept would provide the junior high school age group with a broader understanding about the different kinds of work and the many different ways one may approach preparation for work.

It seems to me that because of the inability of young people to learn about different kinds of work, we have to start even earlier giving them broader understanding about occupations but not forcing them to make a vocational choice. We don't believe junior high students are ready for such a choice, and we don't know enough about the future to have them choose a specific job which may change before they are ready. The idea is to give them a broad base from which they can make intelligent choices when the time comes.

The second part of the proposed amendment calls for projects to assist the student in developing to his maximum through educational part-time work experience. This would be for all youngsters in high school who wish to take advantage of the opportunity. Such programs would assist needy students to continue their education. It would promote a sense of achievement in school-related work experience, enlarge educational opportunities, recognize the value of work, and establish better communications between educators and other important segments of the community.

These experiences should primarily teach young people employability skills--not job skills. Students might then see that regular attendance

in school and at work pays off instead of just being lectured about it. They might see that good citizenship practices and good attitudes toward work and school are amply rewarded. These job experiences can test employability skills and evaluate student growth.

The third aspect of the proposed amendment places the responsibility for entry job placement on the schools. We now assume full responsibility for the college bound student--to get that young student to college and into a program that fits him. But, if more than 80 percent of our young people between high school and the baccalaureate degree must enter the work force directly, it seems to me that our schools must assume this new kind of responsibility. In providing this new service, schools must cooperate with the local State employment service and with business and industry in the community.

This proposal for entry job placement would make school the best place for every young person to be helped in getting that first job. Around this Nation there are many private skill schools functioning very effectively and charging rather substantial tuition rates. They give young people occupational training and promise them jobs. The public schools have never been encouraged to assume this responsibility.

The fourth part of the legislation is to develop new curricula in vocational education to serve youngsters now being ignored. Example: A senior intended to go to college all through high school. But, now he is not going to college. Maybe we need to set up for these young

people short courses of one semester or six weeks to give them specific saleable skills. This could make them employable with entry skills that would be immediately profitable to an employer.

As I said, Congress is still considering that Bill. It may or may not become law.

But as a matter of philosophy--as a matter of policy--the general outline stands, no matter what Congress may decide to do about the purely financial support involved. What we are saying is this: The responsibility of the schools for its students cannot be overemphasized. The responsibility is not just for instruction. It applies to those who leave as well as to those who remain--to the dropouts as well as the stayins. It applies both to admissions and to placement.

In an article for the American Vocational Journal for September of this year I said that no better insurance policy exists for schools and colleges in meeting these responsibilities than the cooperative work experience program. It is a sound, time-tested method of education. Cooperative work experience not only contributes to occupational competence, but for most students it makes learning a pleasant and more meaningful experience. Youth involved in the program develop personal initiative and responsibility. They learn to work with others in an adult world; they recognize the importance of desirable attitudes and acceptable behavior as they associate with fellow workers on the job. Probably no other learning procedure can rival cooperative work experience as a motivating factor for a student to achieve the goals he has set for himself.

The greatest responsibility of education is to provide pathways through childhood and adolescence to adulthood. In the past, there has always been a clear path through college; this alone will no longer do. We must provide other routes--directly into the adult world--from high school and from the two-year post-secondary institutions.

Just as the shops and classrooms are the laboratories for teaching and testing occupational skills, so the work experience programs are the laboratories for teaching and testing employability skills. This is the area in which our schools have failed their students more than in any other. About 95 percent of the young people who lose their first jobs lose them not because of any lack of ability or proficiency--but because they don't know how to get along on the job.

We have the responsibility--and we have the know-how--to convert an unemployable adolescent into a productive adult; a liability into an asset.

I'm convinced that America wants its schools to look for ways to help every individual learn and become a part of society. It does not want them to be part of a system for excluding all those who, for some reason, are not learning well at the moment.

No one in America is in a better position to make all this happen than the man or woman who is fortunate enough to be a member of a State Board for Vocational Education. You are right on the sharpest cutting edge of the educational programs which are the most likely to do the most

good for the greatest number of people in this country from now on.

It might strike you that I am exaggerating a little. But I don't think so. And the reason my statements are factual now when they might not have been some years ago is the simple fact that children USED TO BE brought up by their parents.

I said USED TO BE on purpose. Some of you may have seen the fine article in Saturday Review a couple of months ago by a Cornell professor. He called it "The Split Level American Family". In it he points out that de facto responsibility for upbringing has shifted away from the family to other settings in the society, where the task is not always recognized or accepted.

He goes on to state that, "While the family still has the primary moral and legal responsibility for developing character in children, the power or opportunity to do the job is often lacking in the home, primarily because parents and children no longer spend enough time together in those situations in which such training is possible. This is not because parents don't want to spend time with their children. It is simply that conditions of life have changed."

He goes on to say that without the type of involvement with their parents and other adults in the extended family which once characterized the American family, today's youngsters are forced to involve themselves only with other children of their same approximate age--their peers. The blind leading the blind, in other words.

We must offer these modern-day youngsters a useful alternative--and the best one appears to be giving them a superordinate goal, a joint effort that all can be motivated to work toward. And that doesn't mean giving a youngster the responsibility of passing out the peanuts at the next cocktail party. It has to be something real.

In his article, Professor Bronfenbrenner says we must begin by "desegregating age groups, ability groups, social classes, and once again engaging children and adults in common activities. Here, as in Negro-white relations, integration is not enough. In line with other findings, contact between children and adults, or between advantaged and disadvantaged, will not of itself reduce hostility and evoke mutual affection and respect. What is needed in addition is involvement in a superordinate goal, common participation in a challenging job to be done.

I don't always find myself in agreement with professors of psychology, child development and family relationships--but this time, and on this point, I agree.

And I submit that no better place will be found to put into effect the type of mix he is talking about and to set up the group goals of accomplishment required than in today's modern, well-equipped expertly-staffed vocational-technical schools being provided by you and people like you throughout the United States.

That's why I say, without exaggeration, that in today's somewhat topsy-turvy society the people involved in vocational education are in the very best position to do the most good. You are all to be congratulated for taking on such a critical responsibility. Thank you.

# # #